2: Blackman E-5 (1920-1926) 1927
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THE FELLĀḤÎN OF UPPER EGYPT

obtains for his business, probably refrained from examining the statement as to age made by the girl's parents.

The childbearing age lasts over a long period, for girls mature early, and it is a common thing in Egypt for a woman of fifty to give birth to a child. From an economic point of view it is probably an advantage that so many of the children die, for otherwise the country would soon become over-populated. What is so desirable is that those who do survive should be brought up in healthier surroundings, both moral and physical, and without the unnecessary suffering inflicted upon them by the ignorance of the mothers.

FIG. 17. YOUNG GIRL DRESSED UP TO ATTRACT A HUSBAND

In spite of the frequently indecent talk on sexual matters, there is a strict moral code, especially with regard to unmarried girls, the infringement of which often entails a terrible punishment. This seems somewhat unfair on the girls, *considering the atmosphere in which they are brought up.* If a girl has misconducted herself before marriage, and is discovered at marriage to be unchaste, the disgrace to her family is looked upon as such a terrible one that her own parents will often kill her, sometimes taking the unfortunate child—for she is hardly more than a child—into the desert, and there dispatching her, usually, I

THE WOMEN AND CHILDREN

believe, by cutting her throat. Unfaithfulness in a wife may likewise be punished by death, sometimes death by drowning. If her paramour also is caught they may be thrown into the river or a canal together.

The moral standard is very much lower in some villages than others, and I have observed that villages of pure, or comparatively pure, Egyptian stock are more moral sexually, more honest, and less prone to crimes of violence than are those of mixed negro or Arab origin.

In any case, it is not fair to judge these peasants too harshly. Much cannot be expected of them in their present condition of ignorance, and I believe that until the women can be depended on to exercise a purer and higher influence on their society there is not much prospect of the moral tone of the village communities being raised.

In later years a woman, especially if she has sons, has an honourable position in the family. A man's love and respect for his mother is a marked characteristic among Egyptians, and even after marriage the mother retains the highest place in her son's love and respect. Some years ago I was told that if a man ill-treated his mother and did not show her the greatest honour and respect the whole village would consider him a reprobate. In the married son's household his mother reigns supreme, and the wife who does not show proper respect to her mother-in-law usually has no chance of finding favour with her husband. As an old friend of mine, a man who had always had the greatest veneration and love for his mother, once said to me, " My wife is good, and I am pleased with her, but she must remain there [pointing downward]. My mother is up there [pointing upward]. Did she not carry me here for nine months [pressing his hands on his stomach] ? Did she not endure pain to give me birth, and did she not feed me from her breast ? How could I not love her ? She is always first and above all with me. My wife may change and may lose her love for me. *My mother is always the same ;* her love for me cannot change."

I fear I may seem to have given a very unpleasant impression in many respects of the peasants of Egypt, but I have dwelt on the darker side of the picture at some length not because there is no brighter side, nor because I am lacking in appreciation of the many excellent qualities to be found in most of my village friends. It is

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mentioned palm-branches, which are often carried in the funeral processions, are placed over the graves (see Fig. 53) because they are believed to bring a blessing to the dead. For the same reason plants of *ṣabr* (aloes) are often planted, either in earthenware pots or in the ground itself, close to the mound.

Sometimes these rock-hewn burial-places are of a more elaborate design. Instead of the pit giving direct access to the burial-chamber there may be an intervening passage, the outer end of which, not the immediate entrance to the chamber, is bricked up before the pit is filled with sand and the excavated *débris*.

If the cemetery does not lie in the lower desert, but in, or on the edge of, the cultivation, the graves are somewhat differently constructed. A large chamber is excavated underground and surmounted by a flat-topped or vaulted superstructure, which varies considerably according to the taste or wealth of the owner of the tomb. The chamber constitutes a family vault, and most of the members of one family are buried in it, the sexes being usually divided, the men lying together apart from the women. This is the general rule, but I have been told that it is not always strictly adhered to by the *fellāḥīn*. Above the ground, at one end of the superstructure, is a recess, which indicates where the opening to the grave is situated underground. Palm-branches are placed in front of this recess, and plants of *ṣabr* are often planted on either side of it. At this spot, too, the relatives and friends assemble and sit down during the periodical visits to the graves discussed on pp. 117 ff. and 263 ff.

That the dead should appear to their relations and fellow-villagers soon after death is looked upon as a matter of course and an event of common occurrence. I have heard of many such appearances, which are much welcomed by, and are a great comfort to, the mourners. The following account of an after-death appearance which led to the detection of crime was given me by an old friend, who swore that it was quite true.

Two years before the story was told to me a man in one of the provinces in Middle Egypt married a woman of questionable character. After the marriage he found out that she was unfaithful to him, so one day, accompanied by a friend, he took her out for a walk. She wanted to go one way, but they insisted on her going the way they chose. They went on till they arrived at a newly dug well, into which they threw her and then filled up the

2: Blackman E-5 (1920-1926) 1927
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ANCIENT EGYPTIAN ANALOGIES

I have pointed out on pp. 38 f. that it is to her brother that a woman has recourse when trouble arises between her and her husband. This is evidently a deeply rooted custom, for in the *Complaints of the Peasant*, a literary work of the Herakleopolitan Period (*c.* 2445–2160 B.C.), the peasant flatteringly describes the High Steward Rensi, to whom all his nine petitions are addressed, as "the brother of her that is put away."[1] Unfaithfulness in a wife was evidently punished with death in ancient[2] as it is in modern Egypt. Within the last year or two a case came to my knowledge of an unchaste girl being burned to death by her father and other male relatives, an act that may be compared with the burning of the faithless wife of the chief lector Ubaoner in one of the stories in *King Kheops and the Magicians*.[3]

The love of son for mother, of which I have spoken on p. 45, was evidently as strong in ancient Egyptian families as it is to-day. The following injunction of the sage Anii to his son in respect of his mother bears a striking resemblance to what my friend (p. 45) said to me about his own mother:

> Double the bread that thou givest to thy mother, and carry her as she carried [thee]. She had a heavy load in thee, and never left it to me. When thou wast born after thy months, she carried thee yet again about her neck, and for three years her breast was in thy mouth. She was not disgusted at thy dung, she was not disgusted, and said not: "What do I?" She put thee to school, when thou hadst been taught to write, and daily she stood there . . . with bread and beer from her house. When thou art a young man and takest to thee a wife and art settled in thine house, keep before thee how thy mother gave birth to thee, and how she brought thee up further in all manner of ways. May she not do thee harm nor lift up her hands to God, and may he not hear her cry.[4]

The modern Egyptian women closely resemble their ancestors in their love of personal adornment, though, to be sure, the jewellery of to-day, particularly the earrings and bracelets, are less massive than they were, at least in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasties. The bead collars worn by many of the modern peasant women are very much like those that the women are depicted as wearing in paintings and reliefs of all periods.

Tattooing (pp. 50 ff.) may have been practised in the predynastic age.[5] But that this method of personal adornment was

[1] A. Erman, *op. cit.*, p. 119.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 38, 161 and note 3.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 38.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 239; see also A. M. Blackman, *Luxor and its Temples*, pp. 25 f.
[5] J. Capart, *Primitive Art in Egypt* (London, 1905), pp. 23, 30.

F A 602
F A 684
F A 593
577
A [855]
A [871]
F A 301
F A 304
A [113]

594 462 From a fortnight after marriage until her first son is five years old, the wife helps her husband in the fields, especially in the cotton season; but, unlike the Alawite peasant women for example, she never tackles heavy work.

462 562 593 More often she is busy at home; there is plenty to do, for she mills and bakes, rears and milks the *gamoossa* and the goat, looks after the fowls, prepares manure and fuel, sews, washes, and delouses herself in public.

She is free to come and go within the limits set by village tradition. She is not hidden from the menfolk like townswomen or the women of the middle class. She has to carry breakfast to her husband out in the fields, then return home with the *gamoossa's* dung, and fetch water several times a day. She must go to market to sell eggs, butter and poultry, and to buy oil and other things. Tradition and necessity outweigh the severity of the Koran.

The wife retains ownership of the furniture she brought on her wedding-day, and the money for what she sells. In this way she can save and even lend to her husband, which gives her a certain authority. If he maltreats her, she can go back to her father's house and impose her own conditions before returning — the gift of a dress, or a pair of ear-rings. She is less dependent on her husband than he is on her.

593 181 731 231 A year or two ago, when the men were being levied to meet the flood danger, I heard a woman weeping. "Don't take it so much to heart", I said. "They've taken your husband off, but he'll come back."

"It isn't for my husband I'm crying, but for my lost *gamoossa*. Find me my *gamoossa*."

562 577 The *fellâha* retains her liberty and authority as long as she is wise enough not to infringe the traditions; for then the man gets the upper hand again. She will die rather than let herself be examined or treated by a doctor. She may go out and gossip with the other women as much as she likes, but woe to her if she is found in the company of a man, or even alone in some unwonted place. If she goes wrong, her husband accuses her to her family. Then her 684 577 father, brother, or cousin must kill her. Such *crimes d'honneur*, being commended though not established by Islam, are still frequent and are treated with indulgence by the courts. But the severity of the punishment is out of proportion not only to the crime, but also to the woman's education.

The following is one of a hundred examples. 684
Mahmoud Ahmed 'Abdallah was leaving his village 577
near Nag' Hammadi, one day in March 1937, to go as usual to the fields, when he learnt that his sister, a widow of thirty-five, had been seduced. Hearing this he returned at once to the village and went to his sister's house. Without uttering a word he seized the *fass* he had with him and split open the poor woman's skull. When the crime became known, the Maamûr of the Markaz, the District Judge, and the Inspector of Public Health went together to the spot. The man himself gave the police the weapon he had used to murder his sister, and after confessing his crime, declared that he had wanted to avenge the family honour.

The wife may be the real ruler of the household, but woe 593
to any woman who shows a lack of respect for her husband 562
by walking in front of him on the way to market, or by interrupting him in any way while he is talking or playing with his friends. He never calls her by her own name, but addresses her as: *Ya mara* (Woman!), *Ya bint* (Girl!), [60]
or *Ya Umm Ahmad* (Mother of Ahmad! — his son). He shows his supremacy here by treating her scornfully and giving no sign of affection. The older he gets, the more he demands and values this respect.

"My wife has borne me ten children", said a fellah. "Ten children; and not one of them squints or is blind. With them beside me I feel myself honoured and respected. Thanks to their mother, their feet have never wandered along the paths of shame. She wipes their noses and cleans their faces. She teaches them to kiss my hand when I come back from the fields, to rise when I come in, to serve me first, and never to smoke when I am there."

The peasant wife, who may bear children at any time 844
between the ages of fourteen and forty-five, gives birth in the simplest fashion in the world, sitting, like the women of Pharaonic times. Mishaps are rare.

But the birth is preceded and followed by a thousand 843
practices intended to bring the child fullness of health and happiness. The magic rites are far more important than hygienic precautions. The mother is firmly persuaded that whatever she looks at attentively or wishes for ardently while she is with child will have an effect on the baby. So she

ness ; but these defects are due to his servitude and isolation. In the words of El-Kolâly, his mind is walled-in between ignorance and tyranny. (*)

Moreover the soil and the care of the soil make the fellah patient, long suffering and hard. The soil has imprinted on him something of its own earthiness. His very love is entirely physical, and yet he is not immoral.

He is taught from childhood that he comes from his mother's womb. His bad language when he is angry shows how much he knows of sexual matters. Even girls playing with dolls enact scenes of perfect realism. But this calm animal shamelessness has nothing in common with obscenity. Fundamental morality is not affected by it. The fact that everybody is watching everybody else, together with the conservative temperament and instinctive modesty of the fellaheen, makes offences against morals fewer than elsewhere. As El-Kolâly says, 'Among the fellaheen offences against morality represent only a small proportion of the total'.

Poverty and tradition inure the fellah from his early days to the lack of all bodily ease. A comfortable bed, a pleasant home life, a good table, light company — these are things beyond his grasp. Their absence safeguards his morality. So do the precepts of Islam, it might be added ; but the fellaheen are very ignorant of their religion, and the Sheikhs and Ulema do little to teach them. It is more probable that among these primitive people natural morality keeps its original force.

The fellaheen are moral because they believe in God. They are material, but not materialistic. They believe wholeheartedly in the intervention and providence of God. It is always "*In sha Allah*" — if it is God's will. They make no plan, undertake nothing without adding "*In sha Allah*".

A Greek merchant says to a fellah, "You'll bring me your cotton, then, tomorrow ?"

"Yes, *ya khawâga*, (*) *in sha Allah*."

"Five cantars, not less. You understand ?"

"Yes, *in sha Allah*."

"You'll be able to find the camels for them ?"

"*In sha Allah*."

"I must have the goods before midday."

9: Klunzinger D-5 (1863-1875) 1878
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THE FAMILY.

837 Mohammed's dictum regarding wine is also true of love—it has many good sides, but also a great many and even more that are bad and dangerous. The Prophet has therefore cut Cupid's wings as well as he could; by the armour of concealment he protected the sexes from the swiftly wounding arrow of the god, and granted to his faithful believers the joys of domestic love in full, perhaps in too full, measure so soon, and to as great an extent as they could do homage to them. Matches are made early, and love's thirst is usually quenched in an orderly and legitimate manner. Fallen [848] virgins, illegitimate children, bachelors, and old maids hardly [589] exist in Mohammedan countries, although there are perhaps more unfaithful wives and husbands, and especially wives who have gone astray and been divorced, than elsewhere. Existing regulations render it difficult for these faithless members of both sexes to meet directly; but this is managed [548] by the herd of procurers and procuresses, who are comparatively numerous in the East, though held in the deepest contempt. "Women contrive to meet their gallants, even [538] though shut up in a box," says the Oriental himself in a very common proverb, as well as in many a tale. Adultery committed by a woman was punished with drowning down to a [684] short time ago; among the ancient Egyptians by cutting off the nose. But the Musulman is proud with regard to the above-mentioned state of matters, and listens with scorn to the statistical revelations made by the states of the West, which suffer from all kinds of moral sores no less than the more dignified "sick man."

595 Nothing shall here be said in approval of polygamy, but to those who have had lengthened opportunities for watching its effects it does not appear as a rule so black as Western imagination is accustomed at a distance to paint it. A thorough panegyric would perhaps show that it even possesses some advantages on moral grounds; and in the West also it certainly exists in some social circles. In the East it has prevailed from the earliest times, from the Bedouin to the king,